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Local Boundary Commission

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Fairbanks, Alaska 99707

Local Boundary Commission  
State of Alaska

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Fax # (907) -269-4539

Dear Sirs:

This letter is in opposition to the proposal for consolidating the City of Fairbanks with the Fairbanks North Star Borough. I was born in Fairbanks (my grandparents had been residents since 1904) and recall the discussions regarding various proposed annexations of Slaterville and South Fairbanks around the 1950's. The earlier creation of the Fairbanks School District was obviously needed when the area outside the City began producing a large number of students. I was working in Anchorage when that Borough was formed, and when the City, City of Girdwood, etc., became the Municipality of Anchorage. Although I had returned to Fairbanks earlier, friends reported on the fierce debates when the local police services were extended to the hillside area. Thus, proposals to change local government are nothing new.

I have owned property within the Fairbanks City limits since about 1953 (and currently have a house and condo here) and property 60 miles down the Richardson, and on Caribou Creek (where my grandfather mined in the mid 1920's) about 80 miles up the Salcha, since about 1950. I am well aware of the advantages -- and costs -- of municipal services; and also the very limited needs, and lesser costs, of rural property.

In summary, I strongly support retention of the City of Fairbanks as a first class city, and leaving the North Star Borough as it is.

From your aspect, I suspect you might find that some areas adjacent to the City should be annexed, and I would not oppose some encouragement along those lines. However, it does *not* appear clear to me how, if possible, additional areas might be combined with the proposed "Urban Service Area" were it to be created. JSM.

The following are my thoughts on the "Petition for Consolidation of the City ... and Borough". (As the Borough's library is only open until 9 p.m. on Mondays, Tuesdays, and Wednesdays, it has been difficult for workers to spend much time reviewing it. Please excuse any oversights I may have made; and for the somewhat jumbled comments which follow.)

The Petition appears to have been developed before October of 1998; but I do not recall any open public meetings for comment or input having been publicized; nor have I ever seen a list of the members of the "Consolidation Committee" advancing the proposal. In

fact, the only names I recall associated with the action are those of Mr. Lowell (variously as "Co-chairman", "Chair", and "Petitioners' Representative"; and Mrs. Helms, as "Co-chairman". This lack of identity as to the membership of the Committee is uncomfortable and disconcerting. Misconceptions and distrust could have been prevented had the committee been established through local government, or at least more openly.

Under Section 3, "Reasons for Consolidation", the argument in "Exhibit A, 1." is specious and misleading. Substituting the "Urban Service Area" for the "City" does not reduce the number of local government units. (Are the 6 "Principal Reasons for the Proposal..." the only reasons??) No reasonable review of the State constitutional Convention as a whole shows that it was the intent to dissolve First Class, home rule cities like Fairbanks, and replace them with Second Class boroughs. JRM

In the same Section, #2, is particularly personal opinion, and grossly inaccurate and/or deliberately misleading. It states, "Consolidation will reduce the number of managers ..." and various "offices" from two to one". (For "offices" read 'departments', etc.. While technically true, there is no evidence that there would -- or could -- be any reduction in the actual number of employees, desks, vehicles, or gross salaries. It is just as accurate to say that combining City functions like finance and purchasing, and/or clerk and personnel, or putting the Borough's Planning Department under Public Works, will result in staff reductions and fabulous cost savings. There is no identified fat in the City; it takes a certain number of man-hours to complete tasks, regardless of the title on the door. (One wonders how long the City mayor or "Urban Service Manager" will continue to serve as police or public safety chief; in this case, the City may be too lean, for example. [There is no indication that any real discussion or facts support the estimated or guessed cost/staff savings; the meager financial data on the two sheet "Three Year Operating Budget" -- Exhibit F -- lacks validity.] With no new powers, the Borough has added several employees, including assistants in the Mayor's or executive offices, in recent years. Growth is inevitable so long as the population increases. It will also be inevitable if the central Borough government must take over some of what are now City responsibilities.

A chart showing the staff/employee additions/reductions for the City and Borough over the last decade would have been especially informative for the Local Boundary Commission and potential voters, instead of the petition's sponsor's opinions.

[Note that the City voters are conscious of the number of employees and extent of City powers, and efficient delivery of services, as evidenced by the 1997 vote to eliminate various utilities in favor of private enterprise. The potential currently being studied by the City of transferring waste collection from the City to private enterprise, also a competitive business, is another example of the City minimizing its size.]

Most misleading is the statement that "consolidation will save over two million dollars annually..." Not a shred of evidence is presented to support this wild 'promise' -- which has caught the attention of many who are taking up the banner for consolidation in the media. This statement by the petitioners should be likened to a (drunk) crying "Fire!!" in a crowded theater.

(2)

The second and third paragraphs under Exhibit A (2) likewise contain unsupported or unattributed opinions. Moreover, in a Borough as huge as ours, with a small, densely populated urban area, it is not unreasonable for the City and Borough to differ in their approach to State legislative and/or executive proposals. (Personally, I feel they cooperate quite adequately in their dealings with the State.) (Consolidation would, of course, reduce our influence with the Legislative and Executive Branches by 50 percent.) The City's needs from the State, and federal, governments is sometimes far more sophisticated than the Borough's; while the Borough's wide responsibility for vast rural expanses directs its attention to more basic but equally vital needs.

Section 3 of Exhibit A is again primarily a matter of opinion. (I do not recall a formal petition or "proposal" for consolidation from 1993.) The more recent petition to detach the easterly portion of the Borough, however, is certainly evidence of the strongly felt differences of opinion of the densely populated urbanites versus the rural population. That attempt was probably doomed to failure by factors such as the vast new additional area -- nearly to the Canadian border -- proposed to be combined with the detached portion for a new borough, and poor public relations or lack of confidence in the petition's proponents. This urban vs. rural difference of opinion has existed since before the (forced) formation of the vast FNS Borough as it now stands.

Section 4 is more 'fluff'. Regardless what you call the Fairbanks "rose", when compared with Anchorage it will still be a small (city) -- not even a City, but a huge lumbering second class borough.

Section 5, re solid waste, is again grossly misleading. As a City resident owning property outside the City, I must pay the Borough property tax for solid waste collection & disposal but (while I drive past two or three "transfer stations" to and from that property) the Borough prohibits me from using the stations; yet I pay the City \$170 per year for garbage collection at a lot with a house used only for storage and limited office work -- no garbage is generated there. While the Petition touches on it in passing, little attention is focused on the fact that areas outside the City are served by competing solid waste -- and sewage -- collectors. I am almost certain that the various firms collecting refuse in the areas outside the City (and at the condo where I live inside the City) include the cost of dumping fees to the Borough in their bills -- hidden or otherwise.

Section 6 of Exhibit A, dealing with Economic Development, likely has merit. I, myself, feel that economic development is more properly a Chamber of Commerce type activity than something that should be actively promoted by tax-supported government. Government should provide the proper atmosphere for business and industry, but it should serve our domestic needs equally with the development aspirations of new prospects. That is, if a community as a whole has an adequate and satisfactorily maintained street/road system, good schools, a crime-free reputation and ability to respond to emergencies, and well-functioning utilities systems, then the industry and aspiration of residents and prospective residents alike should facilitate economic growth.

I have not been able to analyze the overall financial impacts. Questions such as who pays off the City bonds for the new police station remain; and also, who gets 'anticipated revenue', such as from court cases the City wins. Also, what will be the status of pending court cases against the City, such as employee suits?? How can a City resident be assured the Borough, if it has the only legal office, will vigorously defend the City taxpayers??

Why was the City of North Pole eliminated from the proposed consolidation?? Certainly arguments favoring downgrading the City of Fairbanks would apply to North Pole -- especially with its low population and limited area. Look at what their savings, per capita, might be if they did not have to pay for their mayor, police chief, etc. -- as claimed for Fairbanks.

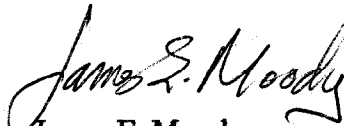
I can't help but believe that many of the petition's signers wouldn't feel deceived if they realized the preparers did not submit more factual material. Many of them, approached in 1998 and early 1999, signed out of frustration of loosing the election for selling the City Utilities. It appears that many more City residents are now well satisfied with the end result of the Utility sales.

The Fairbanks North Star Borough is about the second, third, or fourth largest in area, and second largest in population, in Alaska. Our situation is not like that of Anchorage, Juneau, or Sitka. This proposal is more analogous with the consolidation of the Mat-Su Borough and Palmer. The Anchorage Borough had a very limited geographical area, so a merger was more logical although the take-over of Girdwood was deeply resented and protested. The protests of the hillside community, east of the Anchorage City, to being put under the City police department may pale in comparison to the potential rape or forced submission if communities adjacent to Fairbanks are forced to accept City facilities -- College, Chena Ridge, Ester, etc. -- may not all welcome local police, a consolidated fire department, and other benefits of a first class city --- pardon me, "Urban Service Area".

Through the LBC's eyes, there may be a problem with areas near <sup>but</sup> outside the City limits not being annexed. But -- consolidation will not rectify that. I am even uncertain how they might join the Urban Service Area if there is consolidation. I for one would not be offended if you ask Fairbanks to look more closely at expanding it limits.

Meanwhile, I hope you are able to reject further action on the current Petition.

Respectfully yours,



James E. Moody  
(665 Tenth Avenue, Fairbanks)